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To George Baker Esq.
the historian of Northamptonshire
from the author
as a mark of esteem
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A

Brief Memoir

OF

THE LIFE AND WRITINGS

OR

JOHN BRITTON.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY J. MOYES, BOUVERIE STREET.

A
Brief Mémoir
OF
THE LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF
JOHN BRITTON,
F.S.A.—F.R.S.L., &c.

“ We may regard our past life as a continued, though irregular, course of education ; and the discipline has consisted of instruction, companionship, reading, and the diversified influences of the world.”

FOSTER's Essays.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. MOYES, BOUVERIE STREET.

1825.

[Not for sale.]

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To

A true and valued Friend,

*Who has a heart to feel for, and sympathise with,
the unmerited misfortunes of men of talent, and
is ever eager to mitigate and to relieve them,—
who takes a warm interest in the progressive
improvement of all classes of polite literature and
the arts,—who, to the character of a good father
and husband, joins that of a genuine philan-
thropist, this Memoir is addressed by*

Sept. 1 1825.

THE AUTHOR.

TO JOHN BROADLEY, ESQ., F.S.A. &c.

South Ella, Yorkshire.

A
Brief Memoir
or
JOHN BRITTON,

FORMING PART OF THE PREFACE TO THE THIRD VOLUME OF
THE BEAUTIES OF WILTSIRE.

FOR the purpose of obliging a few friends, who have witnessed the author's conduct through some of his vicissitudes in life, and taken an interest in his progressive advancement in the dignified career of literature and art; and for such others as may have imbibed the contagion of *Biblio-mania*, this memoir is printed in its present style and form. Being written hastily, at several distant intervals, without any matured plan, and without any other motive than to explain the cause of the long delay in publishing the third volume of a work, after an interval of twenty-four years from the time of issuing the preceding volumes, the author is fearful that the fastidious critic may descry many defects in style and matter; but he feels assured that every

man of kind and benevolent feelings will readily make the necessary allowances, and, upon such an occasion, construe every word and passage to the advantage of the writer rather than to his injury.

It can scarcely be requisite to write a line either to justify, or to apologise, for the present essay. Many examples might be adduced as precedents, most, if not all of which, have been generally approved. DR. FRANKLIN, STERNE, MARMONTEL, HOLCROFT, WILLIAM HUTTON, W. GIFFORD, PENNANT, COLERIDGE, S. DREW, BELOE, GIBBON, HUME, and BUTLER, have afforded the reading world both amusement and instruction by the memoirs and reminiscences they have written and published of themselves. Mr. FOSTER has also indulged and obliged us with a most valuable and philosophical essay “on a man’s writing memoirs of himself.”

The amiable character and cheerful temper of Mr. *Hutton*, of Birmingham, have been imparted to his memoir and other writings, and have rendered them both amusing and interesting: they are replete with philanthropy and pathos. In the memoirs of *Gifford* and *Holcroft*, we behold, with admiration and delight, the force of genius, and the power of talent, struggling with and surmounting penury and hardships; and at last obtaining dignified stations in the temple of fame. The prodigious advancement of *Franklin*,

from the station of a printer's boy, or, *vulgò*, "devil," to that of being employed on embassies from his native land to foreign courts, is a noble stimulus to emulation, and a gratifying reward to energy and enterprise.

The "plain unvarnished tale" of my friend *S. Drew*, in the preface to his *Essay on the Identity and General Resurrection of the Human Body*, is another record of the capacity of the human mind — of its resources, and its incomprehensible powers. In *Butler's Reminiscences* we see a laudable example of industry, perseverance, and vigorous talent. The young literary adventurer will derive much advantage and excitement from the "Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Edward Gibbon, composed by himself," and published in the first volume of his "Miscellaneous Works." These memoirs, and his different letters, says his editor, Lord Sheffield, will be found to form "a complete picture of his talents, his disposition, his studies, and his attainments." "Few men, I believe, have ever so fully unveiled their own character, by a minute narration of their sentiments and pursuits, as Mr. Gibbon will here be found to have done; not with study and labour — not with an affected frankness — but with a genuine confession of his little foibles and peculiarities, and a good

humoured and natural display of his own conduct and opinions."

But it is unnecessary to dilate upon this subject. The examples enumerated are sufficient to prove that an author may write his own memoir, without being guilty either of egotism or of an overweening vanity. My primary purpose, as I have stated, was to explain the cause of an almost unprecedented delay; my secondary one has been to excite emulation and enterprise, by shewing the gratifying results of a life of industry and perseverance.

P R E F A C E,

INCLUDING

A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

THE publication of a third volume of a literary work, after the lapse of twenty-four years from the appearance of its precursors, will surprise a stranger, and may, possibly, excite a different, but not a very courteous feeling, in those who have taken an interest, or felt any curiosity, about the completion of the undertaking. But whatever may have been the disappointment or the solicitude of others, mine has unquestionably been much greater; for, in addition to the painful feelings of self-reproach, I have had to bear up against a repetition of sarcastic and censorious inquiries, an impeachment of integrity, and direct, as well as indirect, accusations of various kinds. Numerous, indeed, have been the mortifying reflections which I have experienced on this subject, and as frequently have I resolved to complete the work, and thus immediately remove the cause of so much anxiety; but uncontrollable engage-

ments, which I had never anticipated, have successively arisen to frustrate those resolves, and to direct my attention and resources to other literary works. Had I either been idle, or employed merely in private and personal concerns, I could neither hope for forgiveness, nor for a remission of the smallest portion of that censure which would justly attach to me ;— but when I review the period of time to which I have alluded, and find that nearly the whole of it has been actively and zealously devoted to the literary public — that I have laboured hard, both bodily and mentally, to supply descriptive and historical gratification for the lovers of topography and antiquity,— and have executed, perhaps, more literary works,* within

* A list of these will be found at the end of this volume, and is appended to it in justification of the above assertion, and to shew what perseverance and devotion to a favourite object can accomplish. Though the execution of these works has evidently been the result of much labour, both of body and mind, I have found time to write many sheets in “Dr. Rees’s Cyclopædia ;” in the seven volumes of the “Annual Review ;” in the “Picture of London ;” in the “Beauties of England and Wales ;” and in other miscellaneous publications. Several public institutions and societies, connected with literature, art, and science, have likewise engrossed much of my time and solicitude ; whilst local duties, business, and domestic concerns have also demanded their full share of attention ; yet I commenced my literary career late in life, moved slowly and cautiously onwards, and cannot help regretting that much time has been mispent.

twenty-five years, than any other English author, I confess that my mind is considerably relieved, and that, in the reveries of the moment, I behold the benignant tear of the “recording angel” falling on the accusing page, and “blotting out for ever” the record of my fault. That I have erred, I will not pretend to deny; and that the purchaser of the former portion of the work has a right to complain, is readily admitted; but the style and manner in which the present volume is executed, when compared with its elder brethren, will, I trust, compensate for the long delay in its promised appearance, and redeem me from further censure. Reflecting on these circumstances, I am involuntarily impelled to review myself, and endeavour to call to mind and to place upon record some of those incidents, or incitements, which led me to embark in Literature as a profession, and to fix on Topography and Antiquities as the particular branches of my study and pursuit.

It is hoped, that it will neither be deemed irrelevant nor arrogant, to detail a few particulars respecting my personal history, and thereby trace the origin and progress of the “*Beauties of Wiltshire*.” They all belong to the county, and will hereafter be objects of inquiry, and perhaps of consequence, in the estimation of future topographers and antiquaries.

My native place is Kington St. Michael, and I was born in the month of July 1771. Of my ancestors, parents, and preceptors, or school-masters, I have nothing to boast, and very little to say; for I am not acquainted with any traits or facts relative to them, which are deserving of literary record or remark. They were all, I believe, in humble stations of life, and almost unknown beyond the confines of their respective neighbourhoods. Yet I have heard my parents, and their parents, talk vauntingly of “great relations”—of “rich country squires, and West India proprietors, among their forefathers”—of “unlawful and unjust dispossession of property”—of “might overcoming right”—and that the Brittons and the Hilliers (my mother’s name) were of “old standing”—“good descent”—“respectable families”—and some of them “right worshipful,” in the counties of Wilts, Somerset, and Gloucester. In boyish days, these vague, undefined, and probably exaggerated stories, excited a little wonder, and some share of vanity. They served to raise, in imagination, the humble tradesman to rank himself with the parson and the squire. These “family annals,” combined with the accounts that were conveyed to me of London, of its riches, of its grandeur, and of its wonders, might have produced effects on my young, and rather vivid

mind, which I could neither comprehend at the time, nor can now fully ascertain and develop. The juvenile associations of a village, remote from cities or large towns, are neither cultivated in taste, calculated to improve the mind, nor to inspire emulation;—but as far back as memory can trace any image or impression, I was eager and ardent to surpass my playmates and school-fellows, and ever sought the company of my superiors in age and knowledge. Placed successively at four different rustic schools, I was considered to make rapid progress in such education as was then imparted, and which consisted of a mechanical, dull routine of spelling, reading, writing, and “summing”—or arithmetic. I do not remember ever to have seen a book, in either of the schools, of any other description than Fenning’s, Dyche’s, and Dilworth’s Spelling-books and Grammars, Æsop’s Fables, the Bible, and two or three Dictionaries.*

I cannot, without deep regret and mortifi-

* So completely illiterate were the “Wiltshire schools” in my boyish days, (almost half a century back,) that when I was an apprentice in London, at the age of seventeen, and directed to fetch “Guthrie’s Geographical Grammar” from the dining-room to the drawing-room, I did not understand what was meant. My master was “high enough” to possess these *elegancies*, and was bookish, or learned, enough to have a dozen or twenty volumes in his library.

cation, reflect on the system, or rather want of system, of education pursued by the different schoolmasters with whom I was placed. For instead of teaching “the young idea how to shoot”—instead of stimulating ambition, exciting emulation, and conveying, through the medium of words, useful and practical information—instead of inculcating, even in one solitary instance, the important precept, that scholastic education is intended to qualify the pupil for his future destination in life, and will be either really serviceable or absolutely useless, in proportion to his own industry and acquirements, they merely pursued a mechanical process of tuition, not at all calculated to rouse the mental energies; and I cannot charge my memory with one valuable or beneficial maxim, or piece of sound information, derived from that source. The school, however, was always delightful to me, and its routine of tasks and duties was easily and rapidly performed; but these tasks appear, now, only to have been directed to discipline the hand to writing, and the memory to accounts and words. At such schools, in a rude and truly illiterate village,*

* I do not recollect that I ever beheld a newspaper before the age of fifteen, nor did I ever hear of a magazine, review, or any book, but a few novels, which my elder sister occasionally obtained from the neighbouring town of Chippenham. One event, of rather a literary nature, is, however, freshin

and at a solitary farm-house belonging to my grandfather, were the first fourteen years of my life spent—I had almost said mispent. Many anecdotes and incidents belonging to this period might be detailed, as tending to characterise the times, and shew the deplorable state of the lower classes of society, were I disposed to extend the present memoir; but as my object is to sketch briefly, but faithfully, the leading events of my life, I shall forbear to narrate any occurrences that did not seem either directly or indirectly to lead to my present condition and circumstances.*

my memory. A sale of the household goods and effects of “Squire White,” who was the only gentleman of landed property in the village, and who occupied the “great house,” occurred when I was about thirteen years of age; and a lot of books, nine in number, was knocked down to me for one shilling. Among them were, “Robinson Crusoe,” the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” and the “Life of Peter, Czar of Muscovy;” all of which I read with avidity; and I longed to be cast on a desolate island, and meet with a “man Friday;” or even to encounter some of the adventures of “Christian,” in the Pilgrim’s Progress. That the second work was an allegory, and the first fictitious, never came into my mind.

* Many poets and essayists have eulogised rustic life and manners, as being replete with sylvan joys—arcadian scenes—primeval innocence—and unsophisticated pleasures. Alas! these are but the closet dreams of metropolitan poets and visionary enthusiasts; for I fear that all their pleasing pictures are wholly drawn from imagination, and not from nature. The

At a very early period, I was led to compare and contrast a certain degree of refinement in

genuine rustics, I believe, in all counties, and, I apprehend, in all nations, have very little more sagacity than the brutes with which they associate, and of whose natures they partake: for instance, the ploughman is as dull, slow, and thoughtless as the horses he drives; but, having power over the brutes, he exerts it upon every occasion as caprice or passion sways him. The cow-herd is very similar to the other: in the shepherd we perceive a little more of humanity and inoffensiveness of character, probably derived from the natural mildness of the animals with which he is in constant society. But even the shepherd too commonly acts the tyrant and the savage, by exercising wanton and needless cruelty over his unconscious flock. Every deviation in the sheep from the direct road, or line of demarcation, is punished by the worrying of the merciless cur, which seems ever watchful and eager to obey the master's cruel orders. I have witnessed hundreds of instances where animals have been brutally beaten about the head, &c., for faults which were wholly attributable to the neglect or stupidity of their masters. Yet there are thousands of persons who reprobate the conduct of Mr. Martin, for obtaining an act of parliament to check and punish cruelty to animals. The same class of persons also wish to prohibit every species of education, and consequent amelioration, among the lower orders of society. In spite of obstinacy, of vulgar intolerance, and the besotted prejudices of some, the good and glorious work of education is making rapid advances in this intellectual and affluent country; and, aided as it is by men of such enlightened minds and ardent spirits as Mr. Brougham, Dr. Birkbeck, Mr. T. Campbell, &c., we may fairly anticipate, that all classes of Englishmen must become wiser and better as their minds become more cultivated and more expanded.

the manners of an uncle and his family, from London, who annually visited our part of the country, with the “innocent rusticity” of the villagers. This uncle had obtained a respectable situation in the Chancery office, had lived and moved in rather a genteel sphere of life, and was enabled to spend nearly three months—the long law vacation—in the country. I was fortunately invited to make one of the party, during this periodical sojourn in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, and well remember to have spent four or five autumns in this way, with much enjoyment at the time, and material advantage for the future. It was this association that led me to think of, and hope to see, London—it was then I first imbibed the feeling of ambition—became enamoured of what appeared “genteel dress,” genteel manners, and refined discourse and habits, compared with the clownish deportment, the uneducated and uncouth language, and the broad, prolonged pronunciation of my village companions. Kington now lost all its charms: I anxiously anticipated the annual visits of my London relatives, by whom I was received as an associate till I had reached the age of fourteen. About this period, my parents had become embarrassed by a succession of misfortunes. My father had conducted business for many years as a baker and maltster, had kept a country shop, and was respected as an honest

and upright man. For some years all appeared prosperous and happy; but the family increasing to ten children, necessarily augmented cares and expenses—rivals in business subtracted from the usual profits of trade; an unfortunate connexion with a miller, who might be truly called a “rogue in grain,” without a misnomer, and who sent bad flour and charged high prices, was the cause of a failure in business, and consequent ruin; loss of credit occasioned a loss of the mental faculties in my father, and he became insensible to the hopes and fears of life, and at length sank into the grave. His distressed widow struggled for some time afterwards, to provide for herself and four of the youngest children; but her constitution and life fell under the weight of her anxieties. A sister, about sixteen years of age only, was left in charge of a house, a small business, and two younger brothers. She is described to have acted with singular prudence and industry, till a relation came to the house, and offered her protection and assistance. Instead of which, however, he lived for some time on the residue of the property, and then left the orphans to poverty and to the parish. In this extremity, my sister obtained a friend, who placed her with a milliner at Chippenham, whence she removed to Bath, and was comfortably established in business there, when that insidious enemy to human exist-

ence, a pulmonary consumption, terminated her worldly career, in the prime of life. One of the boys, who had been settled in London for six or seven years, next fell a sacrifice to the same disorder: the other, after serving an apprenticeship to a silversmith, has advanced himself to a respectable line of business. These are some of the vicissitudes incident to human life, manifesting the trials that man is subject to in his short pilgrimage. The annals of every family would afford useful, and often important, lessons to future ages, were they duly recorded; and however insignificant the present memoir may appear to the eye of pride, it may be productive of valuable results on certain emulous minds. If romances can afford any rational amusement, the real history of man must be more than amusing, by being at once interesting and valuable.

About the age of fourteen I was destined to visit my *London uncle*, in a very different capacity from that I had occupied on any former occasion, for I was now to be treated and employed as a servant. This was not considered by me as a hardship, or even a mortification, for it presented variety, novelty, and a source of improvement. It was also one step on the road towards London, that mysterious object of a villager's contemplation. My discipline and labours became severe and heavy, considering my age and

strength, and also considering that I had previously been an idler. The relation I served was strict, harsh, and passionate.* Though

* Ungovernable passion, bordering on insanity, was the characteristic affliction of nearly all the family of the Hilliers. In my boyhood, I often saw battles between my grandfather and grandmother, these with their children, and the latter with “one another.” Throwing missile and dangerous weapons at each other, swearing in the most vehement and vulgar manner, and hurling hatchets, pitchforks, stones, &c., at horses, cows, calves, and other animals, were incidents of almost every day occurrence. Strange to say, that though murder seemed almost inevitable from many of these desperate freaks of passion, I do not know that it ever ensued. Such ebullitions of frenzy were fortunately of short duration, and they were always followed by equally poignant sorrow and humiliation. These vices and follies of the human race, like most other vices, are found to increase with age, unless early checked by the dread of punishment, or by the exertion of true philosophy. I was constitutionally a Hillier: in boyish days I was often a slave to such passionate excitements, and I remember to have made myself frequently ridiculous, and even contemptible, by giving way to passion. Feeling seriously the consequences of such intemperance,—by reading “Watts’s Logic,” his “Improvement of the Mind,” “An Essay on the Conduct of the Passions and Affections,” and some other books of that class, during my apprenticeship—and by reflecting much in solitude,—I successfully checked, and almost subdued, this degrading bias of my natural disposition.

“Passions may be tam’d and brought from their excess,
And watch’d by reason, into gentleness.”

Sir R. HOWARD.

prompt and active myself, it was my fate to suffer much under his discipline. After passing three months thus in the village of Weston, I took leave of my parents and family, receiving, on my departure, two small tokens of remembrance from my mother. That parting is fresh in my memory, as well as the arrangements I had made for a speedy return; my stock of marbles, and other boyish property, was carefully deposited in certain secret places; and the departure from my native village, soon after sunrise, seems as though it were an event of yesterday. So tenacious is memory of occurrences which, at certain times in life, engross all the thoughts. My parents were left—my home forsaken—and my mind was anxiously, but doubtfully, contemplating the future. The journey to London, on a coach, which travelled at little more than five miles an hour, and which reached the metropolis late at night, was fatiguing to the body; but the mind was fully occupied and amused, and more peculiarly so when passing through Hammersmith, Kensington, Piccadilly, &c., all of which were illumined by thousands of lamps, and afforded abundant matter for curiosity and surprise. The most forcible impressions were, that I should never reach Clerkenwell Close,—that London was endless,—and that to reside in kitchens, under ground, was unnatural and

inhuman. My uncle very soon apprenticed me, for six years, to a wine merchant, without consulting either my inclination, or apparently caring about the result. These six years were dragged on as a lengthened and galling chain ; for my health, always weakly, was greatly impaired by constant confinement in damp, murky cellars. My occupation was a continued series of bodily labour, without mental excitement or amusement—every succeeding day presented only a dull, monotonous repetition of the former ; there appeared nothing to learn, and no prospect of reward or advancement beyond that of a common servant. The porters in the business learnt as much as the apprentice ; yet they were rewarded by annual or weekly salaries. I felt my situation irksome and miserable, and ventured to remonstrate with my master and uncle, but without any remission of labour, or improvement in comfort. My health becoming more and more reduced, with scarcely a prospect of recovery, my master at length gave up about half a year of my service, presented me with two guineas, instead of twenty which he had engaged to do, and sent me into the world to shift for myself.

It is necessary to remark, that during this apprenticeship—this immurement in a *London cavern*—I stole an occasional half hour in a morning, between seven and eight o'clock, to look

at the sky, breathe a little fresh air, and visit two book-stalls in the vicinity of my “prison cave.” The rational food and medicine obtained from these sources, not only supported life, but furnished that information which enabled me to ascertain the seat of certain diseases which had long preyed on my frame, and threatened its dissolution. After purchasing and reading Chesselton’s “Anatomy,” Quincy’s “Dispensatory,” some “Treatises on Consumption,” Buchan’s “Domestic Medicine,” Tissot’s “Essay on Diseases incident to Sedentary People,” Cornaro “on Health and Long Life,” and several other medical and anatomical works, I was flattered with the persuasion that I knew my own constitution, its diseases, and the regimen and medicines necessary to restore and preserve health. Dr. Dodd’s “Reflections on Death,” his “Thoughts in Prison,” and all his other writings, were familiar to me at this time: as were Ray’s “Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of the Creation,” Derham’s “Astro and Physico Theology,” as well as Benjamin Martin’s numerous and pleasing writings on Natural and Experimental Philosophy. The miscellaneous works of Smollet, Fielding, Sterne, &c., were likewise perused with great avidity; but all the reading I could indulge in, during my term of legal English slavery, was by

candle light, in the cellar, and at occasional intervals only, not of leisure, but of time abstracted from systematic duties. To compensate for this time, I was compelled to labour with additional exertion, and to adopt the most rapid modes of performing my tasks. To bottle off, and cork, a certain number of dozens of wine, was required to constitute a day's work, and this I could generally accomplish in ten or eleven hours, and I then had three or four hours for my favourite pursuit of reading. Unacquainted with any literary or scientific persons before I had reached my twentieth year, my studies, or rather bookish amusements, were very desultory and miscellaneous. They were not directed to any particular object, and were consequently unavailable to any useful end. Towards the termination of my apprenticeship, I fortunately became acquainted, in my morning walks, with a person who was wholly employed in, and obtained a very respectable livelihood by, painting the figures, &c. on watch faces. He was fond of books, had purchased many volumes, and as his business did not require any exertion of thought, he could listen to the reading of others, or enter into conversation, without discontinuing his usual occupation. This person was my first, and principal, or, indeed, my only mentor and guide. He lent and bought me

books, and gave me useful and judicious advice. His name is Essex: he is yet living, and, I hope, happy; for he was an industrious and well-informed man. He always seemed to me to be a sound philosopher, inasmuch as he practised the precepts he inculcated, and afforded a most exemplary pattern to a large family, whom he reared and educated respectably. At Mr. Essex's shop I became acquainted with Dr. Towers and Mr. BRAYLEY; and to the latter gentleman I am more indebted for literary acquirements, and literary practice, than to any other person. He, however, was articled to a mechanical trade, but was neither so much nor so irksomely occupied as myself. He read with avidity, and early evinced literary talents both in prose and verse. It is a curious fact, that we entered into "partnership" to publish a single ballad or song, which was written by Mr. Brayley, and intituled "*The Guinea Pig.*" It was allusive to the passing of an act to levy one guinea per head on every person who used hair-powder. Though ridiculous in the extreme,—for so the author himself characterises it, as a poetical effort,—it was printed on "a fine wire-wove paper,"—a novelty in this class of literature, and charged "one penny." Many thousands were sold; for notwithstanding that this song was "entered at Stationers' Hall," one Evans, a

noted printer of ballads in Long Lane, *pirated our property*, and his itinerant retailers of poetry and music hawked and sung it all over the metropolis. Whilst the sale was yet *rife*, Evans declared that he had sold upwards of 70,000 copies.—A choice paper impression of this ballad, which has a wood-cut, from one of Bewick's Pigs, at the top, will be sought for as an “*extra rare*” curiosity, by some confirmed Biblio-maniac, at no remote period. Strange as it may appear, it may be safely affirmed that to this junction and circumstance are to be attributed the “*Beauties of Wiltshire*,” the “*Beauties of England and Wales*,” the “*Architectural*” and “*Cathedral Antiquities*,” the “*History, &c. of Westminster Abbey*,” as well as all the other works that have been jointly and separately written by us.* On the present

* Besides writing nearly the whole of the first six volumes of the “*Beauties of England and Wales*,” Mr. Brayley is author of the History of Kent, and part of London, consisting of three volumes, in that work. He also produced, (in conjunction with Mr. Herbert,) a volume of Poems, 8vo., and “*The History, &c. of Lambeth Palace*,” 4to. The “*History of Thanet and the Cinque Ports*,” 2 vols. 1817; “*Popular Pastimes*,” 4to. 1816; “*Descriptive Sketches in Islington*,” &c. 4to. 1819; and “*Topographical Sketches of Brighthelmstone*,” 8vo. 1824, were also written by him. But his chief literary work is “*The History and Antiquities of Westminster Abbey*,” 2 vols. 4to. 1818-1823; which, for

occasion, however, I must forbear entering further into auto-biography, fearing that the narrative might be regarded as trifling or egotistical; although the vicissitudes I experienced, after being released from my cell,—the privations I endured—my pedestrian journey from London to Plymouth and back—my predilection for theatrical amusements, and for reading and debating societies, and my occupations in wine cellars, counting houses, and law offices, would collectively afford a series of not uninteresting events and subjects, both for reflection and for description.

In consequence of writing an occasional essay for "the Sporting Magazine," I became acquainted with Mr. Wheble, the proprietor of that miscellany, who was also joint proprietor and editor of "the County Chronicle," a weekly newspaper. This gentleman, in the year 1784, whilst residing at Salisbury, was induced to undertake a literary work intituled "the Beauties of Wiltshire," which he proposed to publish in

diligent and cautious investigation, for fulness of information, and impartial development of facts, I am confident will ever reflect the highest credit on my worthy and esteemed friend and coadjutor. His "Londiniana," 5 vols. small 8vo., and his "Historical Descriptions of the London Theatres," 4to., are now in the press.

two volumes, and for which he had solicited and obtained subscriptions.* Soon afterwards, he

* The following is a copy of the printed “*Proposals*” (issued by Mr. Wheble), which may be regarded as a curiosity. It is very evident, that the humble and worthy “Compiler” could not have made any very accurate calculation of expenses, receipts, or materials to constitute his work :—

“ Proposals for Publishing by Subscription, in Two Volumes, crown octavo, (embellished with Engravings,) a Work entitled the ‘ Beauties of Wiltshire ;’ to contain a Descriptive Account of the Houses, Gardens, Antiquities, Paintings, Sculptures, and other Ornaments of taste and magnificence, that are to be seen at the Country Seats of the principal Nobility and Gentry in the County of Wilts. To comprise, also, a General Description of the County ; including what is curious and entertaining relative to the History of Wiltshire.

“ The price of the two volumes will be Ten Shillings ; half to be paid at the time of subscribing, and the remainder on the delivery of the books.

“ Subscriptions are received by J. Wheble, the Compiler of the work, at his house in the Close, and Mr. Easton, Salisbury ; Mr. Cruttwell, Mr. Meyler, and the several booksellers in Bath ; by all the booksellers in Bristol ; Mr. Forty, Chippenham ; Mrs. Swayne, Devizes ; Mr. Harold, Marlborough ; Mr. Kearsley, Fleet-street, and Mr. Wilkie, St. Paul’s Churchyard, London.

“ *To the Public.*—The Work here proposed has been thought a necessary and a laudable undertaking ; insomuch, that many have expressed their surprise it was never attempted before.

settled in London, where he became so fully occupied in business, that Wiltshire and its

“ That the County of Wilts (hitherto not generally described) affords ample scope for a publication of the kind, is obvious: *the remains of antiquity, the events of time, and the fair ornaments of the present day*, all conspire to furnish subjects the most interesting and delightful; these, so deservedly the objects of a literary pursuit, have engaged the compiler’s attention; and in order that his humble endeavours may meet the public eye with correctness, the whole will be revised by persons whose taste and judgment, he presumes, will render the work in some degree worthy the patronage to which it aspires.

“ Whilst the subscriptions of the nobility and gentry are most respectfully solicited, the compiler begs leave to suggest the great obligations he should be under for any manuscripts or other particulars relating to the history of Wiltshire, which may be considered as a favour to himself, and a compliment to the public.

“ The size of the Engravings will be a small oval, six inches wide, and three and a half inches high. This is mentioned, in case any lady or gentleman may choose to enrich the work with drawings for either of the Copper-plates.

“ The present subscribers consist of near 300 of the principal nobility and gentry of Wiltshire, and the neighbouring counties.”

It is proper to subjoin to this account a copy of an Advertisement which Mr. Wheble published in the county papers, in the year 1800, on the publication of the first two volumes of the present work:—

“ *Beauties of Wiltshire.*—As names, with subscriptions, were some years ago obtained for a work of the above title, the subscribers are respectfully informed that it is

Beauties were altogether forsaken. In my occasional intercourse with him, he learnt that I was a native of the county, and urged me to undertake the task which he had previously engaged in, but for which he had never obtained any material information, nor possessed any other qualification than good intention. He had received a few pounds from different subscribers, and therefore felt himself bound to produce a work conformable to his prospectus, and calculated to redeem his credit. Though, like himself, I was but little qualified for the duties of a Topographer,—for I had neither studied the subject, nor was I acquainted with any person to whom I could

now published, but on a larger scale than at that time proposed.

“ It is the earnest desire and wish of the person who received those subscriptions, (and at whose instance the present work is published,) that the subscribers may be satisfied in any way they think proper; either in being allowed the subscription money out of the price of the work, or in any other manner they may choose to require.

“ Copies, on large and small paper, may be seen at Mr. Hood’s, bookseller, Poultry; J. Wheble’s, the County Chronicle Office, Warwick Square, London; at Mr. Collins’s and Mr. Easton’s, Salisbury; and at Mr. Cruttwell’s and Mr. Meyler’s, Bath; from either of whom the work may be had, on producing receipts, and payment of the remainder of the price thereof.

“ Fine paper copies, 2 vols. royal 8vo..... £1 16 0

“ Small paper do. 1 4 0.”

apply for advice or assistance,—yet without either rudder, compass, or chart, I was, however, hardy enough to put to sea, and was more indebted to the flowing tide of chance, and to the fair wind of indulgence, than to any skill or talents of my own. The account of Wiltshire, in the “*Magna Britannia*,” was all the printed materials furnished me by Mr. Wheble; but that is not a work calculated to initiate a novice into the science of Topography, nor yet to afford him an attractive example for popular writing. To me it was not only wholly uninteresting, but almost unintelligible, so peculiar, technical, and distinctive is topography, when compared with the classes of miscellaneous literature to which I had been previously devoted. Moritz’s “Travels in England” on foot, had engaged my attention: about this time, Warner’s “Walks in Wales” were popular, and Pratt’s “Gleanings” obtained much notoriety. Indeed, these works so much captivated my inexperienced mind, that I regarded them as models of excellence, and fancied that a *walk through Wales* would be one of the greatest treats in existence, and would also qualify me for writing tours, or topographical essays. Accordingly, (after having engaged with Mr. Hood, a respectable publisher in the Poultry, to write or

compile,—for he was indifferent which,—“*The Beauties of England and Wales,*”) Mr. Brayley and myself made a pedestrian tour from London, through several of the midland and western counties, into North Wales, in the summer and autumn of 1799; and having perambulated every county in that division of the Principality, we returned through Cheshire, &c. to the metropolis. The experience acquired during this laborious, but highly interesting and amusing journey, in the course of which we visited all the chief objects of curiosity within the line of our progress, was of great use when we seriously commenced the fulfilment of our literary engagements, on returning home.

We then proceeded to finish the two volumes of “*The Beauties of Wiltshire,*” and also began the account of *Bedfordshire*, for “*the Beauties of England and Wales.*” It was now that we first obtained a due conception of the importance of the task we had undertaken, and we experienced much difficulty in satisfying our own minds as to the accuracy and originality of the information we were upon the eve of communicating to the public. Having wholly attached ourselves to literature, it occurred to us, that we had a character both to obtain and to support, and that the exercise of a strong judgment and much

attention was necessary, in order to enable us to complete our labours with success and honour. We discovered, also, that during our tour we had inconsiderately commenced our researches at the *wrong end* of the kingdom ; and that our *topographical notes*, and other memoranda of the counties which, according to the plan of the work, were the first to be described, were by far too meagre for the gratification of antiquarian curiosity. Our publisher, however, was of a different opinion, and urged us forward, by stating that such works did not require much original matter,—that there were plenty of publications to copy from and abridge,—and that he only required the “ *Beauties*. ”

In proportion as we read, thought, and conversed on the subject, we became more and more persuaded of the necessity of visiting places, in order to describe them, and of studying and analysing every account we could obtain, before we ventured to write a new one. These ideas led to a new arrangement ; and late in the season, and during the printing of the topographical notices of Bedfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire, I was induced to visit many places in those counties, and transmit “ church notes,” and other memoranda, to my coadjutor in town. In these journeys, I fortunately obtained introductions to, and acquaintance with,

gentlemen who proved themselves both competent and willing to assist the work, and who opened to us many new sources of information.

During the progress of the first volume of the “*Beauties of England*,” which is certainly very slight and imperfect, when compared with our subsequent labours, we gradually and almost imperceptibly acquired, not only a knowledge of the essential branches of topography, but also a relish, and even partiality, for its details. The reproofs of some critics, among whom was the late amiable Mr. Gough, and the partial (yet, perhaps, not altogether undeserved) approbation of others, gave a new impulse to our exertions, and made us increase in diligence, and be more scrupulous in execution.* These feelings, indeed, gave origin to the “*Architectural Antiquities*,” which work was commenced in consequence of the disapproval, on the part of our publisher, of *Antiquarian Subjects and Prints*. He contended, that the “*Beauties*” of a country consisted in its fine seats, picturesque scenery, &c., and that antiquities and natural curiosities

* As the work proceeded, Mr. Brayley travelled over Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Durham, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Kent, and other Counties, for the purpose of making notes and obtaining information; and Devonshire, Cornwall, Essex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, &c. were visited by me for similar purposes.

ought not to be introduced ; but our experience and sentiments led to a contrary result, and hence differences, and even warm contentions, arose between us, although we had in some measure provided for the introduction of what we considered to be as fully, if not more interesting, by inserting the word, " Delineations" in our prospectus and title-page.

In this state of affairs, I obtained two very respectable publishers to join me in the " Architectural Antiquities," and with them I am not aware of ever having had any dispute. The whole management devolved on myself, and the work has proved most singularly successful. Mr. Brayley, about the same time, planned and commenced a work called the " Antiquarian and Topographical Cabinet," which became very popular ; but which, from many adverse circumstances, he was constrained to sell at its very commencement.*

The " Architectural Antiquities" were nine years and two months in progress, and extended to four large quarto volumes, which comprise 278 engravings, with a very large portion of

* It was purchased by the engravers, Messrs. Greig and Storer, who are reported to have cleared 5000*l.* by its success ; and it is now republishing, by the latter, in another form. This " Cabinet" has given rise to several other graphic works, of the same size and mode of execution.

letter-press. The whole cost the proprietors more than 8,000*l.* A few of the articles were written by friends who had studied the respective subjects, and who were well qualified to develop their history. In the Preface to the last Volume, it is asserted—and with truth—that the execution of the work was progressively improved, in every department, as it advanced.*

* The passage is as follows :—“ Since its commencement, almost every necessary article and luxury of life has increased in price, and among these all the component parts of a book have been advanced in a more than common ratio. The paper, printing, drawings, and engravings, used in the present volume, have risen, at least one-third, above the prices of *the same articles* used in the first volume ; yet, there has been no additional charge made to the purchaser.” “ As long as I continue to trouble the antiquarian world with embellished works, it is my determination to profit by experience ; to emulate the best, and endeavour to satisfy my own judgment, and gratify that of men of knowledge and science. To deserve and secure the approbation of the honest and discriminating critic, has impelled me to perseverance and exertion, and to obtain it will be the most permanent reward.” Again, in the Preface to my volume on “ Font-hill Abbey,” I was induced to write, “ As many of the purchasers of this volume may not be acquainted with my other literary works, and may be deterred from looking at them from prejudices against the dulness of antiquarian subjects, generally, I trust it will not be deemed impertinent or improper to state, that although my historical and descriptive essays must necessarily contain some technicality of language, and cannot possess the

The work above described, was intended to be, and is, chiefly a miscellaneous collection of picturesque views of ancient buildings, but a few plans, sections, and elevations, were occasionally introduced in the course of publication. During its progress, being continually at a loss for some elementary and scientific illustration of the distinctive forms and principles of the "Ancient Architecture of Great Britain," I was induced to commence a "Chronological" volume on the subject. This includes an account of the origin and progress of the various styles of building employed in our Ecclesiastical Edi-

interest and pathos of poetry or of the well-written novel, yet I have endeavoured to adapt the style and matter of those essays to almost every class of readers. In the histories of the *Castles and Ancient Mansions* of the Country, (see "Architectural Antiquities," vol. ii.) will be found many anecdotes and facts illustrative of the manners and customs of our ancestors; and the splendid and truly interesting *Cathedrals* of our island furnish abundant materials for illustrating the progress of the arts and sciences, the history of architecture and sculpture, and the influence of monastic rites and customs. Biographical anecdotes of eminent and illustrious personages are necessarily connected with the subject. These are themes of no common or trivial nature, and can scarcely be said to be uninteresting or unimportant to any person. If an author properly appreciates them, and has talents to do justice to their varied characteristics, his writings, accompanied by scientific and picturesque illustrations, cannot fail of making lasting impressions on the feelings, fancy, and judgment of the reader."

fices, illustrated by eighty-six prints, in which examples are given of the varieties of ancient buildings now remaining in this country, in views, plans, elevations, sections, and details. It also contains a dictionary of Architectural terms, and particularly of those explanatory of the different parts of our ancient churches.

On completing the “Architectural Antiquities,” I commenced another work, under the title of “*The Cathedral Antiquities of England*,” and then stated, that both publications would be “expressly devoted to the same subject, and would jointly tend to illustrate the arts, customs, and religious and civil peculiarities of our ancestors, in their various stages of progressive civilisation and refinement. The Architectural Antiquities constitute a complete and regular work; and each Cathedral will also form a specific volume.”

The histories, descriptions, and illustrations of eight Cathedrals have now been published, and have cost the proprietors more than 10,000*l.* To me it is a source of high gratification to know, that they have all been uniformly praised by the periodical critics, and generally approved by Architects and Antiquaries. Such, however, has been the necessary expenditure and the liberality of the publishers in the execution of this work, that they are now many hundreds

of pounds in advance ; yet of some Cathedrals, more than one thousand copies have been sold. Undismayed we proceed, and, if health and life be granted, I hope to prove, that the volumes now in progress, devoted to the *Cathedrals of Exeter and Peterborough*, will equal, if not surpass, any of the preceding, in every department of their execution.

In addition to the publications thus enumerated, and others mentioned in the list, at the end of this volume, it is proper to state, that I wrote and directed all the topographical articles respecting England, Wales, and Scotland, in Dr. Rees's "*Cyclopædia*," commencing at the word *Avebury*.

Nearly all the critical essays on topographical books, in the seven volumes of Aikin's "*Annual Review*," were from my pen ; and as these strictures were dictated, as well by a desire of doing justice to every writer, as of advancing the science, and were free from undue partiality and from that severity of censure which too often attaches to anonymous criticism, I need not be ashamed to own them. Besides, this task of criticising my rivals and friends proved of infinite advantage to myself. I was induced to review my own works, analyse their style, sentiments, and pretensions, and diligently study to improve my mind and taste, the better

to qualify myself for the delicate and difficult task in which I was engaged.

A small volume, devoted to the “*History of Corsham House*,” and to an account of its once famed collection of pictures, was published by me, and has long been out of print.

In a pamphlet, intituled “*The Rights of Literature*,” I endeavoured to direct the attention of our legislators and the literati to a subject which really disgraces the former, and impeaches the patriotism of the latter. I mean the iniquitous enactment which compels every author who publishes a book, whatever may be its nature, quality, merits, or value, to *give away* ELEVEN copies to so many public and *affluent* institutions.

Suffering as I have done, and continue to do, by this very *partial*, unjust, and oppressive act, I have publicly appealed against it,—have shewn its sophistry, in professing to be “for the encouragement of learning and literature,”—and have proved that it is at variance with the best principles of English jurisprudence, by levying an exorbitant tax on that literature which it professes to protect; and as long as I have power to wield a pen, it shall be employed in endeavouring to obtain an abolition of this obnoxious Statute.

In writing “*Remarks on the Life and Dramatic Productions of SHAKSPEARE*,” for Whit-

tingham's beautiful edition of that inestimable author's works, I employed some time, and derived much pleasure. Of such a man, and of such a writer, it is not only astonishing, but almost incredible, that all is mystery and obscurity. It seems as if fame, anticipating his unparalleled celebrity, and jealous of being almost wholly engrossed by the praises of one, when her favours were courted by, and belonged to, thousands, had destroyed every letter, record, and tangible memorial relating to *the Bard of England*, at his decease. His works, however, will last for ever; they are the property of the world,—and can only be lost or forgotten in the general wreck of the “great globe itself.”

FONT-HILL ABBEY, and its spacious and picturesque grounds, were known to me for some years before they acquired marked celebrity; but, on the announcement for sale, in 1822, of the splendid contents of the mansion, public curiosity was excited to an extraordinary degree. Thousands of persons from all parts of the British islands, and even from foreign nations, flocked in crowds to view this “fairy palace in the woods,” as it was then termed. I was tempted to write a quarto volume on the subject, and to have several plates engraved in order to illustrate the building and its scenic accompaniments. This volume I published on my own account, without

the co-partnership of a bookseller, and consequently had not only the cares and labours of authorship to sustain, but likewise all the details of business connected with the subject to attend to and direct: these are not trifling, nor are they all of a pleasing nature. Though this speculation proved successful, it occasioned me much sorrow, for I was imposed upon, deceived, and injured by persons whom I had treated as friends.

“*A Catalogue Raisonné of the Cleveland House Gallery,*” in one volume octavo, was undertaken by me, from a partiality to the fine arts, and with a view of studying the works of so many masters and schools as are preserved in the extensive and valuable collection of the Marquis of Stafford. This volume, as well as those devoted to Font-hill Abbey, and Corsham House, and the pamphlet on the Rights of Literature, have long been *out of print*;—a phrase peculiarly pleasing to an author’s ears.

In a quarto volume, intituled “*The Fine Arts of the English School,*” I wrote a Memoir of Wilson, the Painter; also remarks on the characteristic merits of Reynolds and Gainsborough, and other Essays.

For the “*Magazine of Fine Arts,*” I penned some Essays; and for “*the Architects’ and Antiquaries’ Club,*” to which I have acted as Honorary Secretary for six years, I wrote three “Ad-

dresses," which have been printed for the use of the Members.

Though these various literary works have not been executed without very great labour, solicitude, and perseverance, yet I have found time to act as Honorary Secretary, for six years, to the *Wiltshire Society in London*, and have bestowed both zeal and money towards establishing and supporting that institution, which is expressly founded to aid and assist indigent but deserving boys, from the county of Wilts. In my boyish days, I should have regarded such a society as a parent and friend; and it will have more than my good wishes in the evening of life. As a Manager to one literary institution, and a Director, &c. to another, my time and zeal have also been often exercised; and I trust that both may still further be devoted to them; for deriving, as I have done, much pleasure and profit from literature, I am fully disposed to promote, to the best of my abilities, all societies and plans that are founded for literary objects, and for the protection and reward of men of talent. These, however, are not my only occupations; for as a commissioner, clerk, and surveyor, I have frequent demands on my time and attention.

My good father considered me an *idle* boy, and I believe always disliked me; but he was

very partial to my next brother, Thomas, because he was ever willing to work. Thomas could drudge on, at any task, from morning till night, and had no avidity for play or boyish pastimes. On the contrary, I was ever eager after sports and amusements of all kinds, and as eager to excel all my playmates at each childish game. Many anecdotes are fresh in my memory on these points of comparison, which, if detailed, would serve to illustrate the natural dispositions and characteristics of youth, as tending to indicate the future capacities of manhood. Holcroft, in his own "*Memoirs*," has given some interesting traits of himself in infancy ;—but I must check my pen, being fearful of rendering that narrative tedious, which I meant only as explanatory of my more recent occupations, and as exculpatory of the delay attending the present volume.

"I cannot too seriously declare," says Holcroft, (*Memoirs*, i. 57.) "that I wrote these *Memoirs* with a conscientious desire to say nothing but the pure truth, the chief intention of them being to excite an ardent emulation in the hearts of youthful readers, by shewing them how difficulties may be endured, how they may be overcome, and how they may at last contribute, as a school of instruction, to bring forth hidden talent."

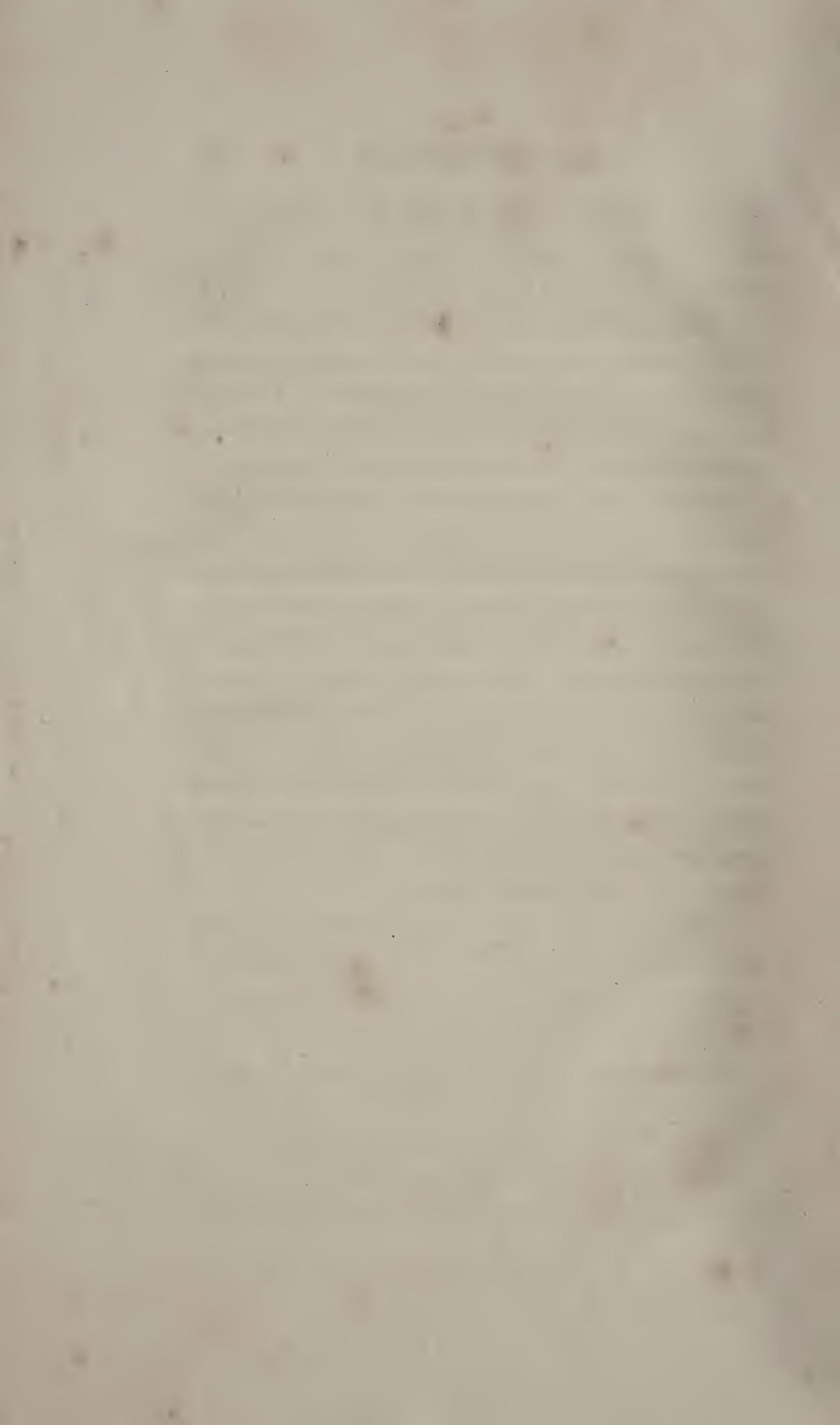
The present unpremeditated memoir has been hastily written, and originated in the persuasion, that candour and sincerity in an author are best calculated to secure the confidence of his readers. The story it unfolds has traits of novelty and peculiarity, which cannot fail to amuse and even instruct some persons, although it may excite a contemptuous feeling in the proud and supercilious. Whilst the latter, however, are as much below my regard, as the man of candour and liberality is deserving of my esteem, I shall neither be ashamed to acknowledge my parentage, nor to avow my progress in life, being fully convinced, that to advocate the cause of emulation and industry is the most efficient means of advancing the best interests of mankind. We are good or bad, great or humble, illustrious or insignificant, only by comparison ; and whilst a Shakspeare, a Franklin, a Johnson, a Goldsmith, a Gifford, and a Garrick, although of obscure birth, are justly applauded and honoured in the annals of our country, I cannot consider it either as ill-timed or disgraceful to relate whence I came, what I have done, and who I am ;—but were I to expatiate on the latter points, it might be construed into vanity. I could further say that I consider myself both rich and happy—my riches consist in paying my way, exemption from debt, in having many com-

forts around me, particularly a large library, well stored with the highest treasures of intellect in literary composition and graphic execution, and in a conviction, that the remainder of my life will enable me to increase these comforts, and even to obtain a few luxuries. Possessing a disposition to regard every feature of *Nature* with admiration, and to derive delight from every page in her immense volume of genius and of wisdom; partial to *Art*, in her various departments of painting, sculpture, architecture, and engraving; still more interested in, and fascinated by, the writings of our best authors, it would be strange if these sources did not add to, if not wholly constitute, happiness. An affectionate and amiable wife, the esteem of many good and estimable men, an intimacy, I hope friendship, with several eminent and distinguished personages, are, with me, additional grounds for happiness. It is commonly said, that envy and jealousy belong to, and tend to degrade, the literary character. From my own feelings and experience, I can safely say, that authorship is more exempt from these degrading passions, than many other professions. I envy no one, hate no one, and pity and forgive those who have harboured such ignoble feelings towards me. “In speaking thus of myself,” quoting my own

words, “I hope to be pardoned: without any other feeling of egotism than is excited by a solicitude to deserve the confidence of the reader; to explain, and have my *intentions* and *sentiments* clearly understood; to obviate misunderstanding, and guard against misrepresentation,—I have been impelled to detail” the preceding narrative, in this place.

If this “unvarnished tale” fail to conciliate the favourable opinion of any reader who has reproached me for neglecting, or rather delaying, the present volume, I am unable to adduce a better argument. “The Beauties of Wiltshire,” is now, however, completed. I have endeavoured to redeem my pledge to the public, to fulfil every bond of engagement, and to afford my readers the best and most accurate information in my power, respecting the places and persons that have come under review.

FINIS.



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